

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEETING
Municipal Building, 3rd Floor Training Room
September 9, 2015
Minutes

In attendance were the following Economic Development Committee members: Economic Development Committee Chairman Andrew Bissanti, Robert Vallee, and Matt Kelly. Also in attendance were Town Councilors Judith Pond Pfeffer and Brett Feldman, Planning Board Vice Chairman Joseph Halligan, Town Clerk Debbie Pellegrini, Town Administrator Jeff Nutting, Planning and Community Development Director Bryan Taberner, Town Planner Beth Wierling, Steve Sherlock, Sandra Verhaegen, Joan Scaringella, Phil Scaringella, John Pazniokis, and Todd McDowell from Baystone Development.

Chairman Bissanti called the meeting to order at 6:00 P.M.

Economic Development Marketing Update

Bryan Taberner, Director of the Department of Planning & Community Development (DPCD) gave an overview of a report entitled “Economic Development Marketing Update and Priorities” dated August 26, 2015 and addressed to Town Administrator Jeffrey Nutting.

Mr. Taberner indicated that DCPD has been working to market the Town of Franklin’s pro-business environment with a focus on attracting research & development and biotechnology companies to the Town. DPCD developed brochures and advertisements that had a focus on the life sciences. Brochures were taken to the 2015 BIO International Convention in Philadelphia by Representative Roy where he distributed materials focused on Franklin.

Mr. Taberner indicated DPCD attempts to keep current with information about available industrial and commercial properties located within the community and also assists developers with questions when DPCD is contacted about space that might be available within Town.

DPCD is regularly marketing the Town-owned Pond Street property, specifically during the RFP process, noting that for now, until the RFP moves forward, discussions with developers, specifically hotel developers, is on hold.

Mr. Taberner noted the DPCP has advertised within the New England Real Estate Journal, Business Facilities Magazine, Business-in-Focus Magazine, and Expansion Solutions Magazine. DPCD also works with Expansion Solutions Magazine on their “LeadGen” program, which provides the Town with a list of attendees at 19 conference/ trade shows in exchange for the Town purchasing reduced priced advertising in its publication.

DPCD is proposing to attend more trade show/ conferences in the FY16 calendar year in an effort to better market the Town and distribute more marketing materials. The DPCD is also working to better track its interactions with individuals inquiring about the Town of Franklin.

DPCD is continually working with the Franklin Downtown Partnership and the MetroWest Tourism and Visitors Bureau (MWTVB) to market the Downtown and increase the Downtown’s visibility throughout the region. Ads have been placed in the Guide to the MetroWest, as well as other MWTVB marketing materials.

Mr. Taberner indicated DPCD is working with both Dean College and Clark University to implement branding and marketing initiatives. DPCD is utilizing the skills of numerous professors and students to assist in projects that will help develop the Cultural District and produce a “brand” for the Downtown. Mr. Taberner indicated that DPCD is continually working

to market the industrial and office space within Town and will work in partnership with the business community to help market the Downtown as well.

Mr. Kelly asked if the Town has reached out to the Marlborough Economic Development Corporation. Mr. Taberner indicated DPCD has been in contact with Marlborough, but should keep in mind the Marlborough EDC is structured differently as they are a development corporation with a budget specifically for marketing properties and a fulltime Director hired to do just marketing.

Nu-Style Property Update

Mr. Nutting gave a review of the Nu-style property indicating he felt it was in the Town's best interest to file an 81-P plan with the Planning Board to combine properties owned by the Town (lots 2 and 3) to create one lot in order to better market the property for future sale.

Members of the Economic Development Committee agree and advised Mr. Nutting to move forward with the application to the Planning Board.

Pond Street Property Update

Solar Lease Proposals:

Mr. Nutting indicated he does not speak for the Town Council but feels while solar is a more passive use for the Pond Street property, he does not feel a solar project would provide a strong economic benefit to the Town specifically because the Town could not accept more power onto the grid and a long term lease for the property would not be as beneficial as a sale of the property that could bring long term taxes for the Town.

Mr. Bissanti does not feel solar is a viable option for the site and would like to see the solar proposals rejected and the bidders funds returned. Mr. Bissanti asked if anyone would entertain the motion to reject the solar proposals.

Mr. Kelly indicated prior to doing so, he would like to hear what those in the audience think.

Mrs. Scaringella asked if solar isn't a viable option, then why are they here? Indicating this is what the neighbors want.

Mr. Pazniokas inquired about the status of the other proposal that was received that contained a residential and commercial component.

Mr. Bissanti indicated he didn't feel it was practical to consider a condominium proposal so close to new councilors being elected, but definitely felt it was clear that solar wasn't a viable option.

Ms. Verhaegen inquired as to what happened with the potential for hotels between the last meeting and this meeting? Mr. Nutting indicated two companies have expressed interest in placement of a hotel which would utilize anywhere from 2-4 acres of the property. One maybe a standalone use, one with the possibility of other development.

Mrs. Scaringella inquired if the Town would sell the whole property if a hotel use only wanted to use 2-4 acres of the site. Mr. Nutting indicated likely not but that option has not been discussed in a public forum.

Mr. Nutting further discussed the potential fiscal impact of condominium development versus hotel development.

Mr. Kelly indicated he felt the condominium developer's proposal presented fiscal numbers that were too low and doesn't feel any of the current proposals are acceptable for the Town. Mr. Kelly indicated he would like to work with the neighbors moving forward. Mr. Kelly would like to table the discussions until Councilor Padula can be present at the meeting.

Mr. Kelly then indicated he would like to vote to reject the solar project proposals and refund solar companies bid checks and table discussions regarding condominium proposals until the next meeting.

Motion made by Councilor Kelly to reject both solar bids and refund checks to solar companies; seconded by Councilor Vallee. All in favor 3-0-0.

There was a discussion as to when to have an additional meeting, with members discussing whether to wait until after the election or have another meeting soon in fairness to the condominium developer whose check is being retained by the Town while the proposal is being considered.

Audience members indicated they were concerned that Councilors were only cooperating with residents until after the election and then they would develop the Pond Street property as they saw fit for the Town of Franklin.

Mr. Vallee and Mr. Bissanti both indicated it was too close to the election to make any decisions on the condominium proposal and the item should be tabled until after the election.

Mr. Scaringella wanted to know how there can be a proposal for commercial development on the Pond Street property with known traffic issues at the intersection of Pond Street and West Central Street?

Mr. Bissanti agreed, reiterating Mr. Scaringella's comment, how could there be a commercial development on Pond Street if such traffic issues exist?

Motion to adjourn at 6:50 p.m.

All in favor (3-0-0).

Respectfully Submitted,

Beth A. Wierling
Town Planner